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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003003

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES THAKSIN'S SISTER AND ADVISER ON UPCOMING RED SHIRT PROTESTS, POLITICAL PROSPECTS

REF: A. BANGKOK 2931 THAI POLITICAL ROUNDUP
[1B.](#) BANGKOK 2875 THAKSIN STICKS FOOT IN MOUTH
[1C.](#) BANGKOK 2644 AMBASSADOR MEETS CHAVALIT
[1D.](#) BANGKOK 2402 AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH OPPOSITION

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR ERIC G. JOHN, REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (C) On November 23, the Ambassador met with fugitive former PM Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra and former Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama, key unofficial figures within the opposition Puea Thai party leadership. The Ambassador underscored U.S. concerns about the potential for unrest during upcoming red-shirt rallies and urged Yingluck and Noppadon to prevail upon Thaksin to disavow the use of violence entirely. Yingluck and Noppadon bemoaned the judicial double standards they said applied to Thaksin supporters, and expressed an interest in reconciliation talks led by a neutral third party, though both struggled to identify any suitable candidate for such a role. Noppadon told the Ambassador he did not think the next round of protests would lead to the dissolution of Parliament, and he conceded the government would likely remain in power for the foreseeable future. Neither Yingluck nor Noppadon believed Thaksin's trip to Cambodia or Times interview would prove damaging in the long term (REF B), and both were dismissive of the idea that new Puea Thai Chair General Chavalit would serve as Prime Minister in the event Puea Thai was able to form the next government.

[12.](#) (C) Comment: Both Yingluck and Noppadon came across as less confident about Puea Thai's short to medium term prospects than in recent meetings (REF D). We were struck by the fact that they seemed resigned to the likelihood that Puea Thai would remain in the political wilderness in the short-medium term. With no obvious trigger on the horizon for the next round of elections and PM Abhisit and the Democrats seemingly holding all the cards for now, Puea Thai and the red-shirts appear to be struggling to identify a viable path forward.

¶3. (C) Comment, continued: Yingluck appeared far more poised during this meeting than she has been in the past. She spoke with confidence about Puea Thai party operations, strategy and goals, and deferred less to Noppadon, who has accompanied her to all of our sessions with her. While it was obvious that politics does not come as naturally to Yingluck as it does to her brother, one suspects she may well have a bright future with the party. As they departed the Residence, Noppadon quipped: "You just shook hands with Thailand's next Prime Minister" (i.e., Yingluck). End Summary and Comment.

RED RALLIES, AND A CAUTION AGAINST VIOLENCE

¶4. (C) The Ambassador hosted Puea Thai notables Yingluck and Noppadon for tea at the Residence November 23 as part of our ongoing outreach to red-shirt movement leaders, Puea Thai notables, and those in Thaksin's inner circle to urge them to avoid violence in their upcoming round of planned red shirt protests (initially scheduled to begin November 28, but may now be postponed). The Ambassador noted that, tactically speaking, Thaksin and the red shirts had an opportunity to seize the moral high ground by renouncing violence and distancing themselves from some of the more extreme red rhetoric that had emerged in recent days, such as a Chiang Mai red-shirt leader who used his community radio program November 19 to threaten PM Abhisit's life. Yingluck and Noppadon took the Ambassador's point and stressed that the red shirts learned their lesson last April and had disavowed the use of violence.

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¶5. (C) Noppadon told the Ambassador that while he was not worried about red shirts initiating violence in the coming weeks, he feared the government would attack the red shirts and provoke a confrontation. The government had no compunction about carrying out acts of violence against Thaksin and his supporters, he claimed, as evidenced by the fact that Thaksin had already survived repeated alleged planned car bomb attacks (Note: the best-known of the alleged plots was attributed to ex deputy ISOC GEN Panlop, who joined Thaksin's camp about a year ago).

STACKING THE DECK AGAINST THAKSIN?

¶6. (C) Turning to the subject of the long running feud between Thaksin and the current government, both Yingluck and Noppadon outlined for the Ambassador a list of grievances and injustices they believed Thaksin and his supporters had suffered over the course of the last few years. Yingluck argued that Thaksin and his allies had long been handicapped by a system of double standards. For example, the yellow shirts shut down airports with impunity on one hand, while the government suppressed red shirts protests with repeated use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) on the other.

¶7. (C) Noppadon alleged the judicial system was also skewed against Thaksin and his supporters, as evidenced by the fact that former PM Samak Sundaravej had been jettisoned as Prime Minister for a minor conflict of interest transgression related to his role as the host of a cooking show. Noppadon told the Ambassador that Thaksin and Puea Thai were the true champions of democracy in Thailand, while Abhisit and the Democrats were simply interested in maintaining power.

RECONCILIATION PROSPECTS

¶8. (C) When the Ambassador asked about the prospects for a reconciliation between Thaksin and the government, both Yingluck and Noppadon noted that presently both sides were deeply dug in. In order for there to be a dialogue, a

neutral third party with sufficient stature to bring both sides to the negotiating table and who enjoyed the respect of both sides would have to emerge and initiate talks. When the Ambassador asked whether they could name any individuals who might be able to fit that bill, both Yingluck and Noppadon conceded that they could not.

¶9. (C) When the Ambassador asked Yingluck and Noppadon whether any members of the royal family would be able to play a mediating role, they demurred, clearly aware of the perils of commenting on the matter. In response to a question about the Privy Council, Noppadon told the Ambassador that normally the Privy Council Chair would be the obvious candidate to play the role of mediator, but with GEN Prem Tinsulanonda as Privy Council Chair, that was obviously not a viable option.

¶10. (C) Yingluck claimed that Thaksin was not a stubborn person; he was simply interested in dialogue, and as a true businessman, he just wanted the government to "make him a deal." Noppadon added that the RTG had seized 78 billion baht from Thaksin, despite the fact that when he had entered office he had already been worth over 45 billion baht. Thaksin simply wanted the government to come to the negotiating table and be even handed (Note: Thaksin's assets forfeiture trial is winding up, with the last witness to testify November 26, and a verdict expected in early January).

PUEA THAI AND ELECTIONS

¶11. (C) Turning to the subject of Puea Thai's future, the Ambassador asked Yingluck and Noppadon whether they believed there would be new elections at any point in the near term. Noppadon told the Ambassador that he believed elections were

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"possible but not probable." Noting that Abhisit and the Democrats were enjoying the spoils of political power after a long time out of office, Noppadon claimed that they had no real incentive to dissolve Parliament any time soon, and as a result, he did not anticipate they would choose to do so unless their hand was forced.

¶12. (C) When pressed for possible scenarios that could lead to the dissolution of Parliament, Noppadon suggested that a no-confidence debate expected in February might be one possible trigger. Puea Thai had abandoned its earlier effort to adjust the current Constitution, however, removing one realistic path to new elections. He defended the abandonment of the amendment process, claiming it had become increasingly obvious to Puea Thai that the 1997 Constitution -- not the 2006 version -- should be the baseline for reformation discussions.

¶13. (C) Though the party would likely remain in the opposition in the near term, Yingluck characterized the mood within the party as optimistic and energetic, particularly in the north and northeast. When the Ambassador asked about the political impact of Thaksin's recent visit to Cambodia and his interview with the (London) Times online, both Yingluck and Noppadon downplayed their significance. Yingluck told the Ambassador that Thaksin's trip to Cambodia was simply the product of an interest on his part in helping the Cambodian people, while Noppadon claimed Thaksin's Times interview had been distorted. Neither Yingluck nor Noppadon believed that the issues would prove to have any serious long term political implications for Thaksin or the party.

GENERAL CHAVALIT AND FUTURE PUEA THAI LEADERSHIP

¶14. (C) On the subject of Puea Thai party Chairman Chavalit Yongchayudh, the Ambassador asked Yingluck and Noppadon whether he would become the Prime Minister in the event of a Puea Thai victory in the next round of elections. Both Yingluck and Noppadon replied dismissively, adding that while

it would be "up to the people," Chavalit would not be the party's choice as PM. Chavalit was not involved in the day-to-day details of Puea Thai party operations either, Noppadon added, noting that at the age of 77, Chavalit was more of a big picture strategic thinker for the party than anything else.

¶115. (C) Contrasting Chavalit unfavorably with Thaksin's management of Puea Thai's original precursor party Thai Rak Thai, Yingluck pointed out that Thaksin had managed the party from top to bottom and overseen every detail. Chavalit was much older than Thaksin had been then, and could not be expected to reprise the role Thaksin had once played. According to Yingluck, the future political leadership of Puea Thai remained in flux. Someone could easily emerge relatively late in the game to take the reins of the party and serve as the next Prime Minister, and this as yet unidentified figure would likely have strong economic credentials.

JOHN